

Safety Last

As imagined thrillers, even as authentic revelations of the Chicago underworld or international drug traffic serialised in a Sunday newspaper, episodes like the Moscow Trials and the Reichstag Fire Trial might pass; but as part of the everyday lives of ordinary people, they were disconcerting. The policeman on his beat, scrutinising doorways, bundling along a drunk and incapable; the horseguards, splendid and immobile in Whitehall; Cabinet Ministers assembling in Downing Street, the King driving in his motor-car to Buckingham Palace—these were mild and familiar manifestations of authority, worth a curious stare, sometimes even a cheer, but mosdy observed without fear or undue respect. Was it possible that they too might become terrible and strange ? in their ways, secret, bloodthirsty ? Would Sir Samuel Hoare one day confess that he had plotted murderously? Sir Kingsley Wood mysteriously vanish, taken to a remote cellar and there done to death? Guy Fawkes was still celebrated each fifth of November, urchins with blackened faces collecting pennies, and bonfires lighted, rockets leaping into the sky; but who would suppose the stuffed sack with ribald face and ancient hat, absurdly crumpling as flames reached it, a veritable man?

In Hyde Park on long June evenings a voice might sometimes be heard, one among many and diverse voices, demanding bloody revolution, carelessly listened to by casual strollers, but soon deserted; and there were Blackshirts who, until the wearing of

political uniforms was banned, held meetings,
marched, some-
times with resultant disorder. The
revolutionary voice was

as providing 'an example of moral grandeur and courage
worthy to stand
beside the greatest in our human history', and projects a
novel based on his
life, to be called *Man Alive*. If Fox had lived to execute this
project (he was
killed fighting with the International Brigade in Spain), he
might have been
embarrassed by Dmitrov's subsequent obscurity, which
would have made
Man Perhaps Afive a more suitable title for a novel about
him.